

Coffman Wants to End Bilingual Ballot Requirement ***Unfunded Federal Mandate is Too Costly Coffman Argues***

(LONE TREE, CO) – Today U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-CO, announced his plan to introduce legislation that will repeal a provision in the Voting Rights Act that mandates local election officials print ballots in two languages if it is determined that a substantial number of voting-age citizens have limited English proficiency. Coffman served as Colorado's Secretary of State before being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2008. Currently, sixteen county clerks in Colorado are bracing for orders from the U.S. Justice Department that would mandate voting materials be printed in both Spanish and English before the off-year elections this November.

"Since proficiency in English is already a requirement for U.S. citizenship, forcing cash-strapped local governments to provide ballots in a language other than English makes no sense whatsoever," said Coffman.

Coffman points to Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act that requires multilingual ballots to be provided to U.S. Citizens who are not considered proficient in English, while at the same time the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, by law, requires all applicants to prove basic English proficiency as a prerequisite for U.S. Citizenship.

Nancy Doty, clerk and recorder for Arapahoe County, which is mostly located in Coffman's congressional district, said that if the Justice Department moves ahead with its plan to force her county to provide dual-language ballots it would cost Arapahoe County hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"Complying with the minority language provisions of the Voting Rights Act will be a significant change for Arapahoe County," Doty said. "I estimate the cost for next year's elections will increase by approximately \$350,000 if we have to go to a second language."

Weld County Clerk and Recorder Steve Moreno echoed Doty's concerns about the impact of what he labeled a costly unfunded federal mandate.

"As the Chief Election Official for Weld County, I have major concerns for another unfunded

federal mandate that may be issued by the Department of Justice placing Weld County under Section 203,” Moreno said. “The fiscal impact is a reality due to the added costs of printing multiple page ballots and for the postage. A conservative estimate for the increase would be well over a hundred thousand dollars.”

Currently ten counties in Colorado already have to offer dual-language ballots under provisions in the Voting Rights Act. Lucile Nichols, the clerk in Crowley County, said the requirement is a costly unfunded mandate that few citizens utilize and has caused the cost of administering elections in her small county to skyrocket by doubling the printing and postage costs.

“Whether or not dual-language ballots are used ought to be up to local election officials and shouldn’t be mandated by the federal government,” said Coffman.

How Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act is applied:

The Census is used to determine which political subdivisions fall under the federal Voting Rights Act dual-language requirement. On the long form of the Census a citizen is asked, “How well do you speak English?” and gives the options “very well, well, fair, or none at all.” If the answer is anything other than “very well” then the respondent is classified as not capable of speaking English as outlined in the Voting Rights Act and is counted in the percentage of the population unable to speak English.

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires a political subdivision to provide dual-language election materials if 5 percent or greater of the subdivision’s voting-age population have demonstrated an inability to converse in English. The law also requires a political subdivision to provide bilingual voting materials if more than 10,000 of its residents speak only one language other than English.

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